

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 20, 2002

Contact:

Lawrence J. Goodrich, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a federal government agency advising the Administration and Congress, will testify Friday, June 21, at a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Immigration Subcommittee on the plight of North Korean refugees in China. Commissioner and executive committee member Felice Gaer will present the Commission's remarks. Arthur Dewey, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration, will also testify along with several individuals and representatives of non-governmental organizations familiar with the situation of North Korean refugees in China.

When: 10:00 a.m., Friday June 21, 2002

Where: 226 Senate Dirksen Office Building

Background: Between 30,000 and 300,000 North Koreans are now in China. Most have fled to escape the dire conditions in North Korea, including the denial of religious freedom and all other basic human rights in that country. Since 2000, however, many North Koreans who fled to China have been forcibly repatriated by the Chinese government. Several reports indicate that those who return to North Korea are harshly treated and sometimes killed following capture by North Korean authorities. The Chinese government does not grant refugee status to fleeing North Koreans, even though most if not all meet the international criteria for that status. In addition, the Chinese government does not allow the UNHCR to operate in the border region between China and North Korea, thus preventing that organization from interviewing those crossing the border and assessing their status as refugees. On June 3, the Commission called upon the U.S. government to press China to uphold its international treaty obligations and protect North Korean refugees who have fled there.

Copies of the Commission's recent report and recommendations on North Korea are available on the Commission's Web site at www.uscifr.gov. Print copies can be obtained by calling the Commission's communications office.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Michael K. Young

- Felice D. Gaer Firuz Kazemzadeh Richard D. Land Bishop William Francis Murphy Leila Nadya